An Assessment of Water Resources and Recharge in the Hindmarsh River, Inman River and Currency Creek Catchments

by
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An Assessment of Water Resources and Recharge in the Hindmarsh River, Inman River and Currency Creek Catchments

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Statement of Originality

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University or other institution and, to the best of my knowledge, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except for where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

Vicki E. Carmichael

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary .....................................................................................................i
1.0 Introduction ......................................................................................................... 1
2.0 Catchment Descriptions ...................................................................................... 3
   2.1 Hindmarsh River .............................................................................................. 3
      2.1.1 Topography ............................................................................................ 3
      2.1.2 Soils ....................................................................................................... 3
   2.2 Inman River ...................................................................................................... 4
      2.2.1 Topography ............................................................................................ 4
      2.2.2 Soils ....................................................................................................... 4
   2.3 Currency Creek ............................................................................................... 4
      2.3.1 Topography ............................................................................................ 4
      2.3.2 Soils ....................................................................................................... 5
   2.4 Geology ............................................................................................................ 6
3.0 Hydrogeology ....................................................................................................... 11
   3.1 Hindmarsh River .............................................................................................. 13
   3.2 Inman River .................................................................................................... 18
   3.3 Currency Creek .............................................................................................. 21
   3.4 Potentiometric Surfaces .................................................................................. 24
4.0 Water Resources Management in South Australia ............................................ 28
   4.1 Water Resources Act 1997 ............................................................................ 28
   4.2 Development Act 1993 .................................................................................. 30
   4.3 Environmental Protection Act 1993 ............................................................... 30
   4.4 Water Management Organisations and Agencies ....................................... 31
5.0 Methodology ........................................................................................................ 32
   5.1 Drillhole Data .................................................................................................. 32
   5.2 Catchment Boundaries ................................................................................... 33
   5.3 Land Use Classification .................................................................................. 33
   5.4 Groundwater Recharge .................................................................................. 34
      5.4.1 Water Balance ....................................................................................... 34
      5.4.1.1 Rainfall ............................................................................................... 35
      5.4.1.2 Surface Water ................................................................................... 36
      5.4.1.3 Evapotranspiration ........................................................................... 37
      5.4.1.4 Farm Dam Storage ........................................................................... 40
      5.4.1.5 Farm Dam Evaporation ................................................................... 41
      5.4.2 Chloride Balance ..................................................................................... 42
   5.5 Water Use in Study Catchments ..................................................................... 44
      5.5.1 Field Investigation for Irrigation Volumes ................................................. 44
      5.5.2 GIS Land Use Survey Coverage for Irrigation Volumes ....................... 45
      5.5.3 Domestic Use .......................................................................................... 45
      5.5.4 Stock Use ................................................................................................ 45
      5.5.5 Processing in Dairy Operations ............................................................... 45
   5.6 Hindmarsh Tiers Observation Bore Network ................................................. 46
6.0 Results and Discussion ....................................................................................... 47
   6.1 Bores in the Study Catchments ...................................................................... 47
      6.1.1 Hindmarsh River Catchment ................................................................ 48
      6.1.2 Inman River Catchment ....................................................................... 50
      6.1.3 Currency Creek Catchment ................................................................... 52
6.2 Hindmarsh Tiers Observation Network ................................................. 54
  6.2.1 Water Elevations ........................................................................... 54
  6.2.2 Drawdowns .................................................................................... 60
6.3 Groundwater Quality Trends ................................................................. 63
  6.3.1 Hindmarsh River Catchment ......................................................... 63
  6.3.2 Inman River Catchment ................................................................. 67
  6.3.3 Currency Creek Catchment ............................................................ 71
6.4 Land Use ............................................................................................... 75
  6.4.1 Hindmarsh River Catchment ......................................................... 77
  6.4.2 Inman River Catchment ................................................................. 80
  6.4.3 Currency Creek Catchment ............................................................ 84
6.5 Water Balance ....................................................................................... 87
  6.5.1 Rainfall ............................................................................................ 88
     6.5.1.1 Hindmarsh River Catchment .................................................. 90
     6.5.1.2 Inman River Catchment ......................................................... 94
     6.5.1.3 Currency Creek Catchment ..................................................... 97
  6.5.2 Runoff ............................................................................................ 101
     6.5.2.1 Hindmarsh River Catchment .................................................. 102
     6.5.2.2 Inman River Catchment ......................................................... 105
     6.5.2.3 Currency Creek Catchment ..................................................... 109
  6.5.3 Evapotranspiration ......................................................................... 112
     6.5.3.1 Native Vegetation and Plantation Forests Evapotranspiration ... 114
     6.5.3.2 Total Evapotranspiration ........................................................ 116
  6.5.4 Farm Dams ..................................................................................... 118
6.5.5 Water Balance Components for Recharge Calculation ...................... 121
6.6 Groundwater Recharge ......................................................................... 122
  6.6.1 Water Balance Method .................................................................. 122
  6.6.2 Chloride Method ............................................................................ 123
  6.6.3 Groundwater Balance Method ........................................................ 125
  6.6.4 Recharge Summary ........................................................................ 126
6.7 Water Use ............................................................................................. 127
  6.7.1 Irrigation Volumes (Theoretical) ..................................................... 127
     6.7.1.1 Hindmarsh River Catchment .................................................. 128
     6.7.1.2 Inman River Catchment ......................................................... 129
     6.7.1.3 Currency Creek Catchment ..................................................... 130
  6.7.2 Irrigation Volumes (Field Investigation) .......................................... 131
     6.7.2.1 Hindmarsh River Catchment .................................................. 132
     6.7.2.2 Inman River Catchment ......................................................... 135
     6.7.2.3 Currency Creek Catchment ..................................................... 137
     6.7.2.4 Summary of Irrigation Use ....................................................... 140
  6.7.3 Domestic Use .................................................................................. 141
  6.7.4 Stock Use ....................................................................................... 143
  6.7.5 Summary of Water Use .................................................................. 146
7.0 Sustainable Yield .................................................................................. 149
8.0 Recommended Observation Networks ................................................ 152
9.0 Conclusion ............................................................................................ 154
10.0 Recommendations ................................................................................ 156
Acknowledgments ....................................................................................... 159
References .................................................................................................. 161
List of Tables

Table 1. Area of the study catchments.................................................................5
Table 2. Summary of geology and hydrogeology of the southern Mount Lofty Ranges
       (Furness et al, 1981). .............................................................................11
Table 3. Hindmarsh River Catchment bore status............................................48
Table 4. Primary purposes of bores listed as operational or unknown in the
        Hindmarsh River Catchment ...............................................................48
Table 5. Hindmarsh River Catchment bores completed into geological formations. .48
Table 6. Well yields for the various geological formations in the Hindmarsh River
        Catchment.............................................................................................49
Table 7. Inman River Catchment bore status....................................................50
Table 8. Primary purposes of bores listed as operational or unknown status in the
        Inman River Catchment ........................................................................50
Table 9. Inman River Catchment bores completed into geological formations.....50
Table 10. Well yields for the various geological formations in the Inman River
         Catchment..............................................................................................51
Table 11. Currency Creek Catchment bore status.............................................52
Table 12. Primary purposes of bores listed as operational or unknown in the
         Currency Creek Catchment ...................................................................52
Table 13. Currency Creek Catchment bores completed into geological formations. .52
Table 14. Well yields for the various geological formations in the Inman River
         Catchment..............................................................................................53
Table 15. Summary of observation well details, Hindmarsh Tiers.......................54
Table 16. Summary statistics for the rainfall in mm at the rain gauge station at
         Fembrook..............................................................................................57
Table 17. Land Use in the Hindmarsh River Catchment for 1993.......................77
Table 18. Land use in the Hindmarsh River catchment for 1999. .......................78
Table 19. 1993 Simplified Land Use Classifications for the Inman River Catchment.
         .................................................................................................80
Table 20. 1999 land use classifications for the Inman River Catchment ..........82
Table 21. 1993 Land use classifications for the Currency Creek Catchment ..........84
Table 22. 1999 land use classifications for the Currency Creek Catchment ..........84
Table 23. Rain gauge stations located in the Hindmarsh River Catchment ..........90
Table 24. Average total and effective annual rainfall for the Hindmarsh River Catchment (TIN method) ................................................................. 93

Table 25. Annual rainfall estimations using the isohyet method for the Hindmarsh River Catchment ........................................................................... 93

Table 26. Rain gauge stations located in the Inman River Catchment...................................................................................................................... 94

Table 27. Average total and effective annual rainfall for the Inman River Catchment. ................................................................................................. 94

Table 28. Annual rainfall estimation for the Inman River Catchment using the isohyet method ........................................................................... 96

Table 29. Rain gauge stations located in the Currency Creek Catchment .............................................................................................................. 97

Table 30. Average total and effective annual rainfall for the Currency Creek Catchment ......................................................................................... 100

Table 31. Annual rainfall estimation for the Currency Creek Catchment using the isohyet method ........................................................................ 100

Table 32. Calculated and modelled total streamflow (mm) for the Hindmarsh River Catchment (June 1992 to November 1999) ....................... 103

Table 33. Calculated and modelled total streamflow (mm) for the Inman River Catchment (January 1995 to January 1999) ............................ 107

Table 34. Calculated and modelled total streamflow (mm) for the Currency Creek Catchment (June 1972 to August 1973) ......................... 110

Table 35. Estimations of recharge and evapotranspiration from lands covered with native vegetation in the catchment areas ...................... 114

Table 36. Total annual recharge and evapotranspiration for plantation forests and native vegetation in the study catchments ....................... 115

Table 37. Evapotranspiration for the Hindmarsh River Catchment ...................................................................................................................... 116

Table 38. Evapotranspiration for the Inman River Catchment .................................................................................................................... 116

Table 39. Evapotranspiration for the Currency Creek Catchment ........................................................................................................... 116

Table 40. Summary of Totals for each of the catchments in the study area after correction factors were applied ......................................................... 119

Table 41. Estimated water balance data for Hindmarsh River Catchment ........................................................................................................ 121

Table 42. Estimated water balance data for Inman River Catchment ....................................................................................................... 121

Table 43. Estimated water balance data for Currency Creek Catchment ..................................................................................................... 121

Table 44. Water balance and recharge estimates for the study catchments ................................................................................................... 122

Table 45. Recharge estimates for the study catchments using the chloride method ........................................................................................... 123
Table 46. Salt water balance for Hindmarsh River and Currency Creek Catchments. ................................................................. 124

Table 47. Recharge estimations from the groundwater balance method. .................. 125

Table 48. Summary of recharge methods for study catchments. ........................................... 126

Table 49. Percentages of the total annual rainfall attributed to calculated recharge values ........................................................................ 126

Table 50. Estimated volumes of water used for irrigated land in the Hindmarsh River Catchment (1993). ................................................. 128

Table 51. Theoretical estimations of total amount of water used for irrigation in the Hindmarsh River Catchment in 1999. ........ 128

Table 52. Estimated volume of water used for irrigated land in the Inman River Catchment (1993). ................................................................. 129

Table 53. Theoretical estimations of total amount of water used for irrigation in the Inman River Catchment. ...................................................... 129

Table 54. Theoretical estimations of total amount of water used for irrigation in the Currency Creek Catchment. ............................................. 130

Table 55. Summary data on irrigation practices in the Hindmarsh River Catchment. ................................................................. 132

Table 56. Percentages of bore and surface water used to irrigate in the Hindmarsh River Catchment. ................................................................. 133

Table 57. Summary data on irrigation practices in the Inman River Catchment. .... 135

Table 58. Percentages of bore and surface water used to irrigate in the Inman River Catchment. ................................................................. 136

Table 59. Summary data on irrigation practices in the Currency Creek Catchment. ................................................................. 137

Table 60. Percentages of bore and surface water used to irrigate in the Currency Creek Catchment. ................................................................. 138

Table 61. Estimations of annual domestic water use for the study catchments. ..... 141

Table 62. Estimated number and type of stock and annual water use for the Hindmarsh River Catchment. ...................................................... 145

Table 63. Estimated number and type of stock and annual water use for the Inman River Catchment. ...................................................... 145

Table 64. Estimated number and type of stock and annual water use for the Currency Creek Catchment. ...................................................... 145

Table 65. Revised theoretical irrigation volumes for the Hindmarsh River Catchment. ................................................................. 146

Table 66. Revised theoretical irrigation volumes for the Inman River Catchment. .. 146
Table 67. Water use estimations using field and theoretical data for the Hindmarsh River Catchment..............................................................148

Table 68. Water use estimations using field and theoretical data for the Inman River Catchment..............................................................148

Table 69. Water use estimations using field and theoretical data for the Currency Catchment..............................................................148

Table 70. Estimates of sustainable yield for the study catchments..........................150
List of Figures

Figure 1. Location of Hindmarsh River, Inman River and Currency Creek Catchments ................................................................. 2

Figure 2. Geology of Hindmarsh River Catchment ................................................................. 8

Figure 3. Geology of the Inman River Catchment ................................................................. 9

Figure 4. Geology of the Currency Creek Catchment ............................................................ 10

Figure 5. Location of the Hindmarsh Tiers Basin ................................................................. 13

Figure 6. Locations of the geological cross sections for the Hindmarsh Tiers Basin. ........................................................................ 15

Figure 7. Geological cross sections across the Hindmarsh Tiers Basin ........................................ 16

Figure 8. Geological cross section of the lower portion of the Hindmarsh River Catchment ........................................................................ 17

Figure 9. Geological cross section of the Inman Valley from west to east ........................................ 19

Figure 10. Geological cross section of the Inman Valley from north to south .................................................................................. 20

Figure 11. Geological cross section of the Currency Creek catchment western portion from north to south ........................................................................ 22

Figure 12. Geological cross section of the eastern section of the Currency Creek catchment north to south ........................................................................ 23

Figure 13. Potentiometric contours of Cape Jervis Bed formations across all study catchments ........................................................................ 25

Figure 14. Potentiometric contours of the Tertiary Limestone aquifer in the Hindmarsh Tiers Basin for November 1976 ........................................................................ 26

Figure 15. Potentiometric contours for the Tertiary Limestone aquifer in the Hindmarsh Tiers Basin for November 1999 ........................................................................ 27

Figure 16. Recharge vs rainfall for sand soils ........................................................................... 39

Figure 17. Water elevations for observation bore ENB4 .......................................................... 55

Figure 18. Water elevations for observation bore ENB15 ........................................................................ 56

Figure 19. Water elevations for observation bore ENB16 ........................................................................ 56

Figure 20. Cumulative deviation from the mean monthly rainfall for the rain gauge station at Fernbrook (station number 23823) ........................................................................ 57

Figure 21. Fernbrook rain gauge station cumulative deviations from the mean monthly rainfall and water elevations at ENB2 ........................................................................ 58

Figure 22. Fernbrook rain gauge station cumulative deviations from the mean monthly rainfall and water elevations at ENB15 ........................................................................ 59
Figure 23. Cumulative deviations from mean monthly rainfall for the whole year, winter only and water elevations for ENB2. .................................................................59

Figure 24. Maximum and minimum water elevations for observation bore ENB2. ... 60

Figure 25. Maximum and minimum water elevations for observation bore ENB16. ..61

Figure 26. Drawdowns for observation bores ENB2, ENB4-6, ENB8-12 and ENB20. ..................................................................................................................62

Figure 27. Calculated drawdowns for ENB13-14, ENB17 and ENB19.........................62

Figure 28. Boxplots for salinity concentrations for bores in the Hindmarsh River Catchment...............................................................64

Figure 29. Salinity distributions for different geological formations in the Hindmarsh River Catchment.........................................................65

Figure 30. Bore depth and salinity concentration for bores completed into Kanmantoo Group in the Hindmarsh River Catchment. .........................65

Figure 31. Groundwater salinity in the Hindmarsh River Catchment.......................66

Figure 32. Boxplots for salinity concentrations for bores in the Inman River Catchment..................................................................................67

Figure 33. Salinity distributions for different geological formations in the Inman River Catchment.................................................................68

Figure 34. Bore depth and salinity results for bores completed into the Cape Jervis Beds in the Inman River Catchment .............................................69

Figure 35. Groundwater salinity in the Inman River Catchment..............................70

Figure 36. Boxplots for salinity concentrations for bores in the Currency Creek Catchment ............................................................................71

Figure 37. Salinity distributions for different geological formations in the Currency Creek Catchment .............................................................72

Figure 38. Bore depth and salinity results for bores completed into the Cape Jervis Beds in the Currency Creek Catchment ........................................73

Figure 39. Groundwater salinity in the Currency Creek Catchment..........................74

Figure 40. 1993 Simplified land use classifications for Hindmarsh River Catchment. ......................................................................................77

Figure 41. 1999 modified land use classifications for the Hindmarsh River Catchment ............................................................78

Figure 42. Hindmarsh River Catchment 1999 land use............................................79

Figure 43. 1993 land use classifications for the Inman River Catchment...................81

Figure 44. 1999 modified land use classifications for the Inman River Catchment...82
List of Appendices

Appendix 1
Crop Factors

Appendix 2
Irrigation Needs

Appendix 3
Bore Survey Form

Appendix 4
Well Yields by Depth and Geological Formations

Appendix 5
Water Level Elevations for Hindmarsh Tiers Observation Network

Appendix 6
Maximum and Minimum Water Elevations for the Hindmarsh Tiers Observation Bores

Appendix 7
Salinity Concentrations by Depth and Geological Formation

Appendix 8
Total Dissolved Solids (Salinity)

Appendix 9
Monthly Rainfall Statistics for Rain Gauge Stations in the Study Catchments

Appendix 10
Cumulative Deviations from Mean Monthly Rainfall for Rain Gauge Stations in the Study Catchments

Appendix 11
Summary Statistics for Stream Gauge Stations in the Study Catchments

Appendix 12
Farm Dam Distributions and Volumes for the Study Catchments

Appendix 13
Field Survey Results for the Study Catchments

Appendix 14
Salinity Results from Field Survey

Appendix 15
Glossary
Executive Summary

The Mount Lofty Ranges lie to the east of Adelaide and contain a significant groundwater resource of low salinity. There are three catchments in the Southern Mount Lofty Ranges where minimal information exists on the sustainable groundwater yield - Hindmarsh River, Inman River and Currency Creek. Effective water allocation in this area requires information on the extent of the water resource and the relationship between surface and groundwater. As this resource is coming under increasing pressure for development it is important to develop appropriate land and water management strategies in order to ensure that future development is sustainable.

The hydrogeology of all three study catchments is directly related to the underlying geological formations which determine both the quantity and quality of groundwater in the area: Cape Jervis Beds, Kanmantoo Formation, Quaternary and Tertiary Limestone. Except for the clearly defined confined Tertiary Limestone aquifer in the Hindmarsh Tiers valley, there does not appear to be any apparent delineation of aquifers in the other formations. The Cape Jervis Bed formations are a mixture of erratic sand and clay layers and wells are completed in both. The "aquifers" in the Cape Jervis Bed formation appear to be small, local and not interconnected. The Kanmantoo Group is tapped by many bores throughout each of the study catchments and water quality and well yields appear to be highly variable and most likely dependent on the fracture zones in which the bore is completed.

There are 84 operational bores in the Hindmarsh River Catchment, 47 of which are listed as irrigation bores. In the Inman River Catchment 70 bores are listed as operational with 45 bores listed as being used for irrigation. In the Currency Creek Catchment, there are 61 bores listed as being operational and 25 irrigation bores. These bores are tapped into different geological formations which impact the quality and quantity of water they can provide.

The Hindmarsh Tiers Basin in the Hindmarsh River Catchment has a well established observation bore network with 25 years of record on water levels. Most of these observation bores are showing a decreasing water level trend over the years which is most likely due to decreasing rainfall and increasing irrigation in the area. The potentiometric surface at the lower southeastern end of the catchment appears to have decreased by 10 metres in the last 25 years.

Salinity in the groundwater varies depending on the geological formation the bore is completed in. In the Hindmarsh River Catchment, the lowest salinity concentrations are evident in the Tertiary Limestone formation and the Kanmantoo Group and Cape Jervis Bed formation appear to have about the same salinity concentrations (Cape Jervis Beds are slightly higher). In the Inman River Catchment, the highest salinity concentrations were found in the Cape Jervis Beds and the average concentrations were almost double those in the Hindmarsh River Catchment. In the Currency Creek Catchment, the
salinity concentrations of bores completed into the Cape Jervis Beds and the Kanmantoo Group had similar average salinity concentrations which were a bit lower than bores in the Hindmarsh River Catchment.

Land use in all three catchments was fairly similar with grazing being the predominant land use followed by dairy. Urban developments accounted for 2% of the land use in the Hindmarsh River and Inman River Catchments which is associated with Victor Harbour. The Currency Creek Catchment has had more land use changes in the past 6 years as the area for growing vines has doubled. Hindmarsh River and Inman River have similar amounts of native vegetation (12%) and Currency Creek has about half (5%).

Water balances were calculated for each of the catchments using direct and indirect estimations of the water balance components: rainfall, runoff, evapotranspiration and farm dam volumes. The highest rainfall was estimated for Inman River followed by Hindmarsh River and Currency Creek Catchments. These results are consistent with the weather coming from the southwest in this area. Analysis of the rainfall data indicates that since the last above average rainfall event in 1992/1993, rainfall has been below average. It is estimated that the Inman River and the Hindmarsh River have similar natural runoff volumes followed by Currency Creek. However, the volume of water reaching the lower ends of these catchments is reduced by diversions into farm dams and irrigation use. The highest water loss through evapotranspiration is in the Inman River Catchment, followed by the Hindmarsh and Currency Creek. Inman River Catchment has the highest estimated volume of water in farm dams followed by Currency Creek and then Hindmarsh River Catchments.

Groundwater recharge was estimated for each of the study catchments by three different methods producing three different results: water balance, chloride and groundwater balance methods. In the water balance method recharge was estimated to be:

- 17,152 ML for the Hindmarsh River Catchment;
- 24,581 ML for the Inman River Catchment; and
- 6,347 ML for the Currency Creek Catchment.

The recharge estimates from the chloride method were lower by one order of magnitude and were discarded as a salt balance indicated that there is a net export of salt out of these catchments. This implies that the chloride concentrations in these catchments are not in a steady state and this method of calculating recharge is invalid.

The groundwater balance method recharge values were much lower than those estimated through the water balance method:

- 9,736 ML for the Hindmarsh River Catchment;
- 9,114 ML for the Inman River Catchment; and
- 2,721 ML for the Currency Creek Catchment.
This method is dependent on the groundwater use and baseflow and in the Inman River Catchment it was determined that there was very low usage of groundwater which in turn has resulted in a low estimate for recharge for Inman River Catchments. Therefore, the most reasonable estimate of recharge is most likely the water balance recharge results.

Water use was estimated in each of the study catchments through theoretical estimations and a field survey and estimations of domestic and stock use. The results of the field survey estimated irrigation volumes that were considerably less than the theoretical estimations. The results of the field survey should not be considered to be precise, as the rates of use provided by the irrigators were approximations only. Irrigation use in the Hindmarsh Valley Catchment appears to have increased over the years, as indicated by a two-fold increase in the irrigation use in the Hindmarsh Tiers Basin. In the Inman Valley Catchment, there does not appear to be much irrigation which is mainly due to the quality of the groundwater and surface water in the area. In the Currency Creek Catchment, there is no historical irrigation data for comparison but it is assumed that there is increasing irrigation in this catchment due to the development of vines and olive orchards. The following irrigation volumes were estimated through the field survey:

- 4,854 ML in the Hindmarsh River Catchment;
- 156 ML in the Inman River Catchment; and
- 909 ML in the Currency Creek Catchment.

The following results are for the total water use in each catchment. The higher end of each range is based on theoretical estimations only and, as seen, these numbers appear to be much higher than the estimations based on the field survey. The largest water use was in the Hindmarsh River Catchment where the total water use ranged from 5,087 to 10,382 ML per year. This catchment also had the highest groundwater use with the volumes ranging from 5,464 to 8,784 ML per year. The next highest water use was seen in the Currency Creek Catchment with the total water use ranging from 1,095 to 8,795 ML per year and the groundwater use ranging from 634 to 3,986 ML per year. The smallest water use was apparent in the Inman River Catchment with total water use ranging from 432 to 10,164 ML per year and groundwater use from 109 to 534 ML per year. The largest use of groundwater is in the Hindmarsh River Catchment followed by Currency Creek. Inman River Catchment only uses a small amount of groundwater. Caution should be taken in the accuracy of all these estimations and if more accurate data is made available, these numbers should be revised.

It has been proposed that the sustainable yield for groundwater should not exceed 75% of the estimated recharge. In the Hindmarsh River Catchment, the current level of groundwater use is most likely around 50% of the recharge for the catchment. There is intensive groundwater irrigation in the Hindmarsh Tiers Basin which has more than doubled in the last 25 years. Although the groundwater use in this catchment is below the adopted 75% of recharge, the groundwater usage should be carefully monitored on a regular basis to ensure that the reduction of water levels in the Tertiary Limestone aquifer are not
being impacted further from groundwater extraction. The total water use for this catchment is slightly higher and could be up to 60% of the annual recharge.

In the Inman River Catchment, the groundwater use is very low and well below any level of concern with respect to groundwater sustainability. There is not a lot of irrigation currently occurring in this catchment due in part to the high salinity levels found in both the groundwater and surface water in the summer. There is more concern in this catchment with the surface water resource and care should be taken to ensure that dams and water diversions are constructed and managed in such a way to protect the rights of the downstream users and to ensure that there are adequate environmental flows to protect catchment ecosystems.

In the Currency Creek Catchment, the estimated groundwater use is below the estimated 50% of recharge but the total water use is approximately 50% of the annual recharge. The low groundwater use has been estimated from the results of the field survey where it was found that surface water and groundwater were used in almost equal portions for irrigation. In addition, like the Inman River Catchment, the quality of the groundwater in parts of Currency Creek deters its use for irrigation, stock and domestic use. The level of development in the Currency Creek Catchment is in more of a dynamic state than the other two catchments and future developments should be closely monitored with respect to their impacts on the existing water resources to ensure their sustainability.

Recent changes in the Water Resources Act have placed the burden of water management on local governments and Catchment Water Management Boards. In areas that are not proclaimed waterways, this burden is more pronounced as water management is an invasive issue and in some cases beyond the control and resources of local governments. This presents a challenge to all those involved and it is hoped that this study will in some way assist in the future management of the important water resources in the Hindmarsh River, Inman River and Currency Creek Catchments.